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Letter dated 1 April 2004 from the Permanent Representative of China to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of the Hong Kong Declaration on Sustainable Development for Cities, which was adopted at the United Nations Asia-Pacific Leadership Forum: Sustainable Development for Cities, held in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, on 25 and 26 February 2004 (see annex). I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

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Annex

Hong Kong Declaration on Sustainable Development for Cities

1. We, the representatives of national and local governments, community groups, the scientific community, professional institutions, business and the United Nations and other international agencies, having met at the Asia Leadership Forum on Sustainable Development for Cities, reaffirm our commitment to the goals, targets and recommendations contained in Agenda 21, the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

2. We are keenly aware that close to one billion people in the world live in slum settlements, with 550 million of them in Asia. We renew our commitment to achieving a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers in the world, a Millennium Development Goal reaffirmed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

3. We firmly believe that sustainable development is the key to the future of cities in the Asia-Pacific region and the world at large. In the coming decades, population growth will occur largely in urban areas, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, which will be home to two thirds of the world's mega-cities. We emphasize that national, regional and local governments, civil society groups, business and other stakeholders must redouble their efforts to meet the mounting environmental, social and economic challenges arising from the growing urbanization trend.

4. In an era of accelerating globalization, cities are confronted with both challenges and opportunities. More than ever, cities represent the nexus of commerce, industry, finance, culture, transport and communication, possessing the potential for connecting all areas, rural and urban, and all segments of society into a productive force conducive to fair, equitable and sustainable globalization and urbanization.

5. We have heard inspiring examples of cities in the region playing a leadership role in securing the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. We are convinced, therefore, of the need to enhance collaboration between cities, including capacity development initiatives, and to encourage the exchange of experiences and lessons learned between cities of the Asia-Pacific region. In this context, we underline the contribution to sustainable development of networks between cities, as well as the potential for new networking opportunities in the region.

6. By focusing on integrating sustainable development into city and regional planning and identifying new mechanisms for implementing sustainable development measures, we have agreed upon a range of policy measures and actions as set out below. It is our shared belief that these measures and actions, implemented in a spirit of partnership, including partnerships among cities, and through a participatory approach, will take us forward in our common journey towards a sustainable future.

Leadership and urban governance

7. As centres of civilization and engines of economic growth, cities often embody both the hub of human creativity and energy. We call for the implementation of a long-term sustainable city vision that integrates the economic, social and

environmental needs of cities and that puts the livelihood of citizens at the heart of urban development strategies. In this context we underscore the crucial role of integrated urban and regional planning, drawing upon the best scientific knowledge and information available.

8. We underline the importance of community engagement and involvement in sustainable development at the local level. We realize that appropriate urban governance is essential to the quality of life in cities. We recognize the need to find appropriate means to empower cities, within the context of each country's circumstances, to deal with the sustainable development challenges facing them, including through capacity development. We believe that in order to meet sustainability challenges, local governments need to redefine their roles by providing an enabling local environment, promoting ethical conduct, transparency and accountability in city administration, fighting corruption and encouraging participation of citizens in policy discussion, decision-making and implementation, and raising awareness of sustainable development through education, taking into account the national and local circumstances. We underscore a functioning legal system as an essential component of effective urban governance and as a solid foundation for ensuring citizen participation.

9. We recognize that people are at the centre of development. We call for a renewed emphasis on local leadership in building sustainable cities, with a particular emphasis on empowering women and on increasing women's role in local leadership. We also call on cities to involve youth and the elderly in sustainable development programmes and activities.

10. Aware of the impact of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and avian bird flu on cities in the Asia-Pacific, we underline the importance of public health systems to the sustainable development of cities in the region. We emphasize the importance of preparation of disaster management strategies to cope with both man-made and natural disasters. We also recognize that cities in the Asia-Pacific are vulnerable to the long-term effects of harmful climate change and call on the international community to support the development of regional and local adaptation and mitigation plans and strategies.

11. Sustainable cities could establish procurement partnerships to create economies of scale for innovative technologies, such as hybrid and fuel cell buses, photovoltaic systems and wastewater treatment systems.

Economic growth and job creation

12. In the Asia-Pacific region, as in many other regions, cities are the nerve centres of national economies, as well as locations of wider economic disparity and concentrated poverty and unemployment. We call for specific measures to promote growth in both formal and informal sectors and to implement employment strategies for the poor and vulnerable groups.

13. The diverse and rich experiences in the Asia-Pacific region offer important lessons on how to stimulate urban economic growth. We call for strengthened collaboration among local governments and local authorities in the region by sharing

experience, best practices and lessons learned and by identifying obstacles and constraints to progress. We urge both national and local governments to work together by initiating and targeting policy reforms, as appropriate, at removing barriers to sustainable urban development.

14. We call upon national and local governments to undertake common endeavours, with international support, to improve the infrastructures required for sustained economic growth, in such areas as power, transport and communications, including information and communication technologies, as well as in financial and technical services and human resources. In this regard, we highlight the potential contributions of inter-city cooperation and collaboration, especially in infrastructural projects of regional impact.

15. We urge national and local governments to intensify efforts to develop, adapt and adopt advanced and appropriate technologies, including environment-friendly technologies that offer new opportunities for more efficient use of natural resources, more sustainable industrial practices and new sources of employment.

16. We call upon the international community to promote and facilitate the transfer of environmentally sound technology and expertise in support of local governments in their implementation of sustainable urban development plans and strategies. We further urge the international community to provide financial support to developing countries, with a view, inter alia, to assisting cities in these countries to achieve their sustainable development goals.

17. We stress the importance of public-private partnerships in tapping the potentials of urban economy and in creating income-generating opportunities, and the importance of putting in place participatory processes for stakeholders so that community values and interests, inter alia, can be reflected in planning and implementation, taking into account national and local circumstances. We encourage local governments, in the context of specific local needs and conditions, to put in place policy frameworks for enhancing the competitiveness of the local economy and for facilitating investments and business expansion, including through the establishment of special economic zones, eco-science and industrial parks.

18. We call for renewed efforts to promote small- and medium-sized enterprises by adopting appropriate and favourable fiscal and financial incentives and by providing technical support services that are currently beyond the reach of such enterprises. We urge local governments and local authorities to make consistent efforts to assist informal sector enterprises and to progressively integrate them into the formal economy.

Planning a better environment for urban housing and land use

19. With urban population in the Asia-Pacific region totalling 1.4 billion and expected to rise to 2 billion by 2020, cities have to tackle the daunting challenge of providing adequate and affordable housing for all. We reiterate that every human being has the right to adequate housing, which is essential to an adequate standard of living. We call upon national and local governments to provide for legal security of tenure, equal access to land and effective protection from forced evictions contrary to the law.

20. We emphasize the need to integrate urban housing with economic, social, environmental, demographic and other relevant policies and to engage the efforts of national and local governments, the business sector, non-governmental organizations, community-based groups and other relevant stakeholders in achieving sustainable human settlements. We underline the importance of community involvement and discussion in the planning process.

21. We call upon national and local governments to adopt measures aimed at ensuring that women, children, elderly people and other vulnerable groups be given special consideration and protection in housing policy. We urge national and local governments to take specific steps at all levels to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to public buildings and facilities, public housing and public transport systems.

22. We urge national and local governments to implement an integrated approach to land use, urban planning and management, taking into consideration housing needs, access to transport by the poor and vulnerable, employment opportunities, environmental conditions and community facilities.

Meeting basic social services

23. Provision of basic social services, which includes not only access to modern energy services, transportation, safe drinking water and sewerage coverage, but also health care, education and other essential services, is a fundamental responsibility of national and local governments. We call upon governments at all levels, including local authorities, to adopt an integrated approach to the provision of basic social services to all, taking into account the links between water, sanitation and health and between urban economic growth and environmental protection.

24. We stress importance of access to basic education as a fundamental right. We recognize the critical role of education to achieve social and economic development, especially in the transition to a knowledge-based economy. At the same time, we emphasize the need to ensure social inclusiveness and a commitment to skills upgrading and continued learning.

25. We fully recognize the urgent need for tackling worsening air and water pollution problems in the region and their implications for public health. We commit ourselves to regional and global cooperation to effectively deal with any other emerging public health challenges.

26. We further emphasize the need for harmonizing land-use planning and housing policies, including slum upgrading policy, with water, sanitation, health care, environmental protection and education policies to ensure an integrated and coherent approach to adequate provision of basic social services to all, especially the poor and vulnerable groups.

27. We encourage national and local governments to promote partnerships with civil society, community-based groups, business and other stakeholders to facilitate their contributions to the provision of reliable, affordable, economically viable basic social services, within the context of their national and local circumstances.

Increasing mobility

28. Urban transportation is a major challenge facing local governments in the Asia-Pacific region. The transportation sector has great impact on energy consumption, land use, pollution, economic growth, mobility and quality of life. We urge national and local governments in the region to implement integrated transport and land-use policy that addresses transportation priorities in the overall context of urban and regional planning and economic activities, taking into account the potential for shortening travel distance and reducing travel demand.

29. Sustainable urban transport must be implemented in a way that, first and foremost, addresses the social and economic marginalization of the poor and vulnerable groups. We emphasize the importance of fully addressing the needs of people living in slum settlements and the special needs of women, children, the elderly and handicapped persons.

30. We encourage national and local governments to put in place a combination of modes of transport, including walking, cycling, mass transit systems and private automobiles, that reduces energy consumption and negative environmental impacts, while improving accessibility for all, through, inter alia, the development and adoption of environmentally sound technologies, supported by appropriate regulatory and incentive policies.

Tourism and cultural heritage

31. With a rich cultural heritage, the Asia-Pacific region is a global tourist destination that is witnessing growing numbers of visitors. Tourism has become an important business sector and revenue source for many cities. We encourage national and local governments to promote sustainable tourism, protect the rich cultural heritage of this region and enhance mutual understanding and friendship among the communities of nations through awareness-building activities among both local residents and tourists to highlight the historical significance of such heritage.

32. We urge national and local governments to maintain and conserve the natural, historical, and cultural diversity and heritage of the region, including its intangible heritage. We stress the urgent need of preserving historical urban settlement and landscape forms through appropriate legal frameworks and financial and technical support aimed at conservation and rehabilitation activities.

33. We call upon national and local governments to integrate heritage protection, conservation and rehabilitation into current and future urban development, at both the planning and implementation stages. We emphasize that cultural identities of cities are not only a national asset with great cultural and economic significance; they are also an essential element of sustainable development at all levels.

34. We call upon and support national and local governments to adopt a holistic approach to heritage protection by integrating conservation activities with urban development and tourism and by supporting public and private initiatives and action for rejuvenating and conserving historical neighbourhoods and sites while creating jobs and services and income-generating opportunities.

We express our gratitude to the Government of the People's Republic of China and to the United Nations for successfully convening the Forum and to the Government and people of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Regior of the People's Republic of China for the hospitality and warm welcome extended to all participants. Finally, we pledge to work in determined and concerted action to ensure that all cities in the Asia-Pacific region and across the world will have a sustainable future.

Adopted at the Asia and Pacific Leadership Forum on Sustainable Development for Cities, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China, 26 February 2004